

Fairport's G2 helps kids gain confidence

A program at Fairport's Jefferson Avenue elementary school is using playtime to forge intergenerational friendships, and help young students gain self-confidence.

Called Generation Two (G2), the nonprofit program brings senior citizens and kindergartners together for weekly childcentered play sessions.

The program's goals are quite simple, said Rich Green, principal of Jefferson Avenue School and G2 board member.

"The idea is that as the children play, the adults will listen and play along," he said. "There are board games ... various toys kids can choose, also crafts. There are lots of different possibilities for kids to get creative and draw in another person to their play." For a half hour every week, each child enjoys the undivided attention of a caring adult. The volunteers are trained to affirm the children's decisions every chance they get, with phrases like "I really like the colors you chose," and "That was hard and you did it!" "It empowers the kids and makes them sort of the masters of their destiny for 30 minutes," Green said, adding that the program is as fulfilling for the seniors as for the students they work with.

"Part of the magic of the program is that senior citizens have an attachment to our school, they become part of the Jefferson Avenue School and they become advocates for kids and for school programs. It's a win-winwin."

Longtime volunteer Phyllis Reed even went so far as to characterize the weekly sessions as a kind of support group. "We have a chance to share not only our experiences with our young G2 friends but also what's going on in our own lives," Reed said. "Problems and worries get shared. Great friendships develop. G2 is an antidote to loneliness, to boredom, to feelings of uselessness that sometimes accompany aging."

Parents are also thrilled with the program. Perinton resident Carrie Gersh saw how her son Murray benefited when he participated a few years ago. "G2 helped my son gain confidence," Gersh said. "When he went to kindergarten he was not great at verbally communicating his thoughts, and I think the weekly one-on-one time with his G2 buddy helped with that.

"Because the program focuses on child-led play, my son was empowered to make decisions on what his time with (his buddy) would entail...His boost in confidence translated to the classroom where he became more comfortable contributing to class discussions."

Generation Two has been running at Jefferson Avenue School for more than 10 years, and is also currently in place at School #3, School #41 and School #45 in the Rochester City School District.

"I think it's one of the strongest mental health proactive programs that we have," Green said. "It gets at how to create positive relationships nurturing relationships and create a positive feeling for school. Research shows that kids who are in G2 feel better about their school, their teacher. They want to come to school more, especially on those G2 days. "In these times it's important to make schools feel safe places for kids, help kids feel like they belong. I think that's something G2 does very naturally and very powerfully."

Laughs for a Cause

A Comedy Night to benefit the Generation Two program will be held at 7:30 p.m. Friday, March 23, at the Jefferson Avenue School, 303 Jefferson Ave. in Fairport. The event will feature six local comedians, including Funniest Person in Rochester finalists. Admission is \$15 per person with coffee and dessert included. Tickets are sold at the door. The comedy is PG-13 and not suitable for young children. For more information, visit www.g2rochester.org.

Pick of the Week

The Webster Community Chest will host its third annual Greater Rochester Peep Show from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday, March 17, and from noon to 4 p.m. Sunday, March 18, at the Webster Recreation Center, 1350 Chiyoda Drive.



G2 senior volunteers with their buddies in a session held earlier this school year at Fairport's Jefferson Avenue School. PROVIDED



East Extra

Missy Rosenberry Guest columnist